



The Transfiguration (Lk 9:28-36)

That was quite a story we heard in our Gospel this morning; there are mountains, clouds, mysterious voices from clouds, dazzling white clothes... (you may be relieved to hear that I have forgotten the washing powder joke, so you're spared!). How easy it can be though, when one is quite familiar with a story, for it to lose some of its wonder.

In the reading, Jesus seeks – and receives - God's approval, in the presence of 3 close friends, with Moses the great lawgiver and Elijah, arguably the greatest prophet, also putting in an appearance. In fact, the whole of the Trinity seems to be present; the Father in the voice from the cloud, Jesus the Son, and the Holy Spirit, in the form of the cloud.

For just one moment, the disciples gain a glimpse of the glory of the Kingdom of Heaven; no wonder they 'kept silent and in those days told no one any of the things they had seen'. Jesus' face changes, and his whole being seems to radiate a blinding light. The Orthodox church calls this 'uncreated light' that is, not a worldly phenomenon at all, but as a result of a direct encounter with God, which alters and transfigures the whole of creation.

I like the OED's clear definition of transfiguration; as a '**complete change** of form or appearance into a **more beautiful or spiritual** state'.

So, what relevance might this amazing transfiguration story have for us here and in 2017?

I wonder if any of us can remember having had a 'transfiguration moment'? Perhaps we were tired or fed up, and something just happened that stopped us in our tracks, and transformed our way of thinking and feeling.

One of the things I really enjoy about my job as a speech and language therapist, is the way that children have, of being refreshingly genuine and unselfconscious. I remember running a speech group recently, feeling worn out and wishing the hour would pass quickly, when one of the pre-schoolers completely out of the blue, between activities declared, 'I'm a bunny!' bent down, and started hopping about the room. Within seconds, the rest of the group were doing the same. I leave it to your imagination, as to whether or not I joined in, but it was a wonderful moment of spontaneous innocence, that reminded me of the great sense of fun and imagination, that we adults can forget so easily, and how we were definitely designed for happiness and laughter. That moment transfigured the rest of my day and I still smile as I remember it!

These transfiguration moments, which lift us out of ourselves and give us a glimpse of something 'other' - even an aspect of God - are precious – and **so easily** passed by unnoticed. I firmly believe that God wants ongoingly, to change and transform us into the people he created us to be... and perhaps by prayerfully reflecting on these glimpses, we are taking small steps in that direction.

Rowan Williams writes in a reflection on the icon of the transfiguration, that 'looking at Jesus seriously changes things; if we do not want to be changed, it is better not to look too hard or too long'. Powerful words.

A helpful way of reflecting and opening ourselves up to gaining these glimpses, can be through quiet days and retreats. (Bishop Martin recently led a quiet day for St David's) On these occasions, we are guided and supported in drawing near to God, and to listening for promptings of the Holy Spirit. They offer us opportunities for transformation and fresh insight. And now I am preaching probably more to myself than to anyone else – but the vital bit with quiet days and retreats, is what happens **after**. Do we just return home to our lives, maybe thinking 'that was a nice day' and not giving it another thought in all our busy-ness, or do we make a conscious decision to maintain and nurture any tiny insight or change that might have come about in us?

We need to **be** – and remain - 'awake'. In the reading we heard that the disciples, 'since they had stayed awake, they **saw his glory**'. As humans, there are various things that prevent us from being 'awake' and receptive. We're not fully 'awake' when we're lethargic or complacent and it all seems too much effort for too little gain...or when we're prejudiced and don't give a person or opportunity a chance, because we assume we won't like it. We're not fully awake when we want to stay in our 'safe' zone, and don't want the passing unease of our comfortable beliefs to be challenged or enlarged. And most of all, we're not fully awake when we're just too busy to notice. (and I continue to preach as much to myself!)

Of course, most of these transfigurational glimpses occur in the mundane, ordinary, everyday situations, hence being so easy to miss. But it would be

exhausting and unsustainable to always live on the mountaintop, constantly being dazzled by revelations and dramatic experiences.

Years ago, as a student, I confess that I tried to be what I thought was a 'trendy' Christian. I went to churches where everyone seemed young, perfect, constantly happy and vociferously overflowing with their certainty of and love for, God. I am not trying to criticise, because there's so much to be said for energy and joy, but looking back, for me at that time, it seemed that life as a 'real' Christian had to be a permanent mountaintop experience – and if you didn't FEEL it, then you weren't quite 'right with God'. Needless to say, I soon started feeling despondent, and not a little inadequate. I wonder if other people have had similar experiences...

The Scottish theologian Henry Drummond writes 'God does not make the mountaintops, for us to **live** on the mountaintops. It is not God's **desire** that we live on the mountaintops. We only ascend to the heights to catch a broader vision of the earthly surroundings below. But we don't live there. We don't tarry there. The **streams** begin in the uplands, but these streams quickly descend to gladden the valleys below'.

Most of our life is lived in the valleys. Some valleys feel very deep and dark. Some might appear shallow, from a distance. But we can surely be sustained and equipped by the fruits of our glimpses and transfigurational moments, if we are willing.

I would like to end by sharing with you a sonnet by Malcolm Guite, entitled Transfiguration, which I think, speaks for itself:

For that one moment, 'in and out of time',
On that one mountain where all moments meet,
The daily veil that covers the sublime
In darkling glass fell dazzled at his feet.
There were no angels full of eyes and wings
Just living glory full of truth and grace.
The Love that dances at the heart of things
Shone out upon us from a human face
And to that light the light in us leaped up,
We felt it quicken somewhere deep within,
A sudden blaze of long-extinguished hope
Trembled and tingled through the tender skin.
Nor can this this blackened sky, this darkened scar
Eclipse that glimpse of how things really are.

...

Amen